

March 4, 2018

My name is Margaret Balboni, I live in Amston, Connecticut. I fully support HB 5372 An Act Concerning Dyslexia Instruction Offered in Teacher Preparation Programs.

How do states respond to dyslexia-specific laws? IDA's *Knowledge and Practice Standards* were developed to provide a framework for course content and to serve as a guide for teacher preparation and certification. Districts across the state of Connecticut are striving to prepare their teachers to meet the needs of students who exhibit characteristics of dyslexia. Learning to read can be a significant challenge for students with dyslexia. Teaching reading effectively, especially to students experiencing difficulty, requires considerable knowledge and skill. Through my work at Literacy How, I have designed and delivered a 30 hour in-service course to give educators the knowledge that they need in order to deliver evidence-based *Structured Literacy* instruction in school settings.

This course describes effective literacy instruction and explicitly teaches systematic word identification/decoding strategies that benefit most students and are vital for those with dyslexia and offers a road map to prepare teachers to use diagnostic assessment data in conjunction with a problem-solving approach to design and deliver effective lessons for students who exhibit characteristics of dyslexia. Time and time again, teachers thank me because they never received these content in their undergraduate programs. While efforts like these are essential first steps in the process of preparing teachers to learn evidence-based practices, they must be supported with professional development that shows teachers what it means to design and deliver effective *Structured Literacy* lessons. This knowledge should be delivered prior to teachers entering the work force. Between 15 and 20% of young students demonstrate significant weaknesses with language processes, including but not limited to phonological processing, that are the root cause of dyslexia and related learning difficulties. Of those who are referred to special education services in public schools, approximately 85% are referred because of their problems with language, reading, and/or writing. Informed and effective classroom instruction, especially in the early grades, can prevent and relieve the severity of many of these problems. For those students with dyslexia who need specialized instruction outside of the regular class, competent intervention from a specialist can lessen the impact of the disorder and help the student overcome the most debilitating symptoms.

Just this past week, one of the participants in my 30-hour Structured Literacy course stated, *'I have a 6<sup>th</sup> year in Literacy from (a university in Connecticut, which for obvious reasons shall go unnamed) but I never got an opportunity to learn a lot about Structured Literacy.'* A teacher who receives training in preservice programs would save districts money, empower teachers prevent academic failure for students who exhibit characteristics of dyslexia. This bill is vital in the plan to ensure minimum standards for knowledge and practice within our institutions of higher education.

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